PERSONAL COMPUTER

Christmas

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COASTAL AREA ATARI USERS' GROUP

an independent computer users' group

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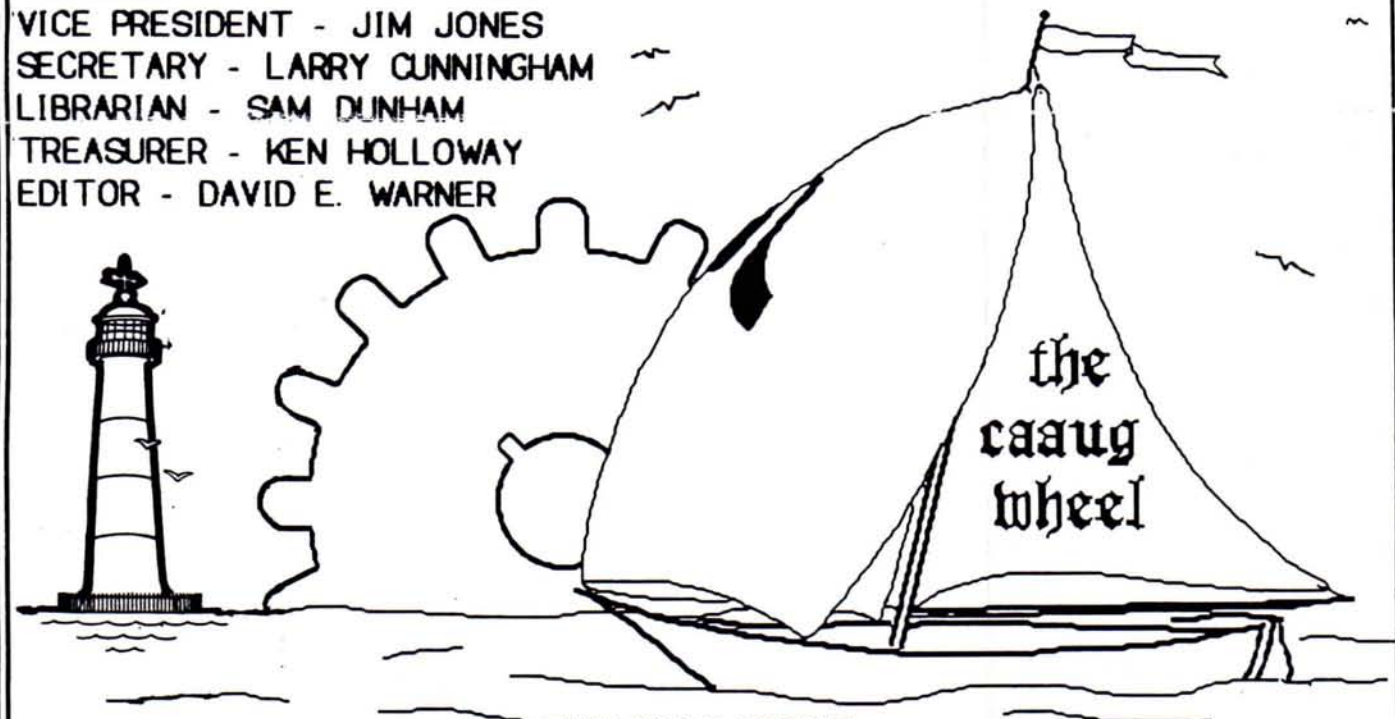

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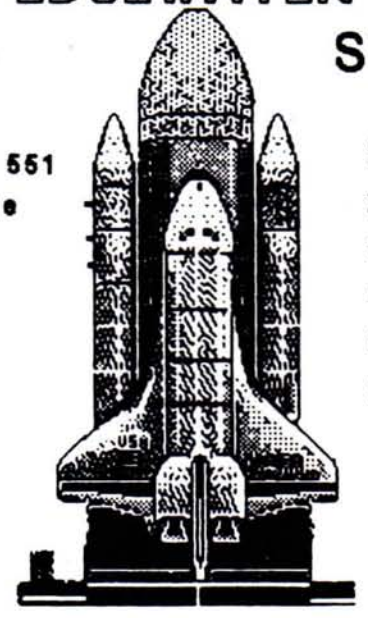

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terms. If you have any interest in or curiosity about the use of computers and keyboards in the production and performance of music you owe it to yourself to visit the MIDI SIG.

This is an enthusiastic group with varying degrees of knowledge, but one which is working together to build a thorough knowledge starting with the basics. One of the things they are working on now is attempting to define the ideal requirements for MIDI software, survey the offerings and identify the better programs on the market.

Look for the announcements of their meetins or check with the chairman, Tom Reese (435-2066) and be sure to attend one of the meetings -- you will be glad you did!

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New Officers Elected for '88

Did ya ever notice what happens to the guy who can't make the meeting? He gets elected President, that's what! Anyway, here is the lineup for 1988! A good slate of people who will work hard for you!

President, David Warner.
VPresident, Jim Jones
Secretary, Larry Cunningham
Treasurer, Ken Holloway
Librarian, Lowen Overby
Editor, Larry Loe.

Larry Loe will also serve as the ST Librarian, and Lowen Overby will handle the 8-bit. Jeff Wimmer will stay on as ST SIG Chairman, and Tom Reese will handle the MIDI SIG.

Each officer has been given instructions that we want to grow in 1988 and expand to insure that we serve the whole Gulf Coast Atari community. Let's look forward to some fund raising events for 1988 and let's do another show at the mall for starters. You can start now, by saving your newspapers. We are going to try and collect as many as possible each month at the meeting and sell them for recycling. If you are interested in handling the pickup and delivery, contact me and let me know.

We are going to keep meeting at the Biloxi Public Library for at least the next six months, so be sure to mark that on your calendar.

Don't forget to write an article for Larry Loe for the newsletter!

I hope all of you have a Merry Christmas, and a very Happy New Year! I love you Pamela!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

paper, to work out any designs, circuits, or wiring. We then build a prototype, to see if the design works. Luckily, in all of our cases, we have worked on them, until they did work, without too many problems. Once the product is tested thoroughly, we then scurry through a bunch of catalogs, to find the best prices on the components, to build 10 or so. Then comes the instruction or installation manuals, which we try to make as easy as possible, for the average person to read. Once we figure out the total costs involved (components, labor, and small profit, etc.), we then set a price for people to buy them. Even after a product has been released, we constantly look for; simple design, easier to read instructions, and revise them accordingly. Customer suggestions and support have definitely helped us along the way! Because of our advertising, most of our sales have come from mail-order, and have dealt with customers from all over the world. However, if a local customer wants any of our products, it can easily be picked up at my address. Below is a compendium of most of our products, and a brief explanation of their uses.

Our very first product, was a memory upgrade for the 800XL (256k). Shortly thereafter, came a 320k upgrade for the 130XE. The main advantage of having a memory upgrade done on an 800XL, is the ability to run most 130XE software. With either upgrade, another advantage is the ability to set-up a ramdisk. What is a ramdisk? You use a program called "handler", that tells the computer to use the extra memory (above 64k) to simulate an extremely fast disk drive. Shortly afterwards, we then came out with a 64k upgrade for the forgotten 600XL, allowing it to run 800XL software. Then, we added a 576k upgrade for the 130XE. Our next different product was the Immitator Controller, which performs similar to Happy's 1050 controller (for Happy board owners), with 2 small toggle switches to control the read/write speed and write protect (no more disk notching!). Our controller has the advantage of two-color LED's, for monitoring the write protect status. Next in line, was our ICX-85 Keypad. You say you already have a CX-85? Well the drawback of the CX-85, is the fact you have to load a "handler" program, that was only written for a couple of Atari's programs (Bookkeeper and Visicalc), and the handler would not work with most other software. What we did is approach the hardware aspect of it, by changing it's (CX-85) circuit board to ours, using a different connector also. All that is required then, is to install a connector in the computer, plug the keypad into that, and the ICX-85 keypad will work with all your software! Then, along came our neatest "little" product, the Ram-Aid. Being made for upgraded XL/XE's (256/320/576k), you could load up a ramdisk with files/programs, do a cold-start, go to another program, then come back to the DOS and the data you put in the ramdisk, would still be there!

Somewhere in between those products, we squeezed in another product, the Modem Mouth. This device is a phone monitor, for use with modems lacking an internal speaker, like the Atari 1030, and the cheaper model of the Avatex. You can then hear all those; busy signals, disconnects, or even someone screaming into the phone, saying "This is not a BBS anymore!"

The next upgrade we produced, was again, for that lowly 600XL, taking it all the way up to 256k, making it compatible with a 256k 800XL! That is the only upgrade we made, that we did not put into kit form, because of the complexity of the circuit involved (we do the installation). The last upgrades we designed, were for another "forgotten" computer in Atari's line, the 65XE. Our first one takes it up to 128k, and makes it fully compatible with a standard 130XE, including the extra Antic modes! The next step, we took the 65XE all the way up to 320k, making it compatible with a 320k 130XE. AFter having a 1200XL awhile back, I missed using those function keys (F1-F4), doing one-button cursor movement, and 8 other built in features for them. After some research, we found out that when Atari made the minor changes to the O.S. for the 600XL/800XL, they left the coding in it to interpret the function keys! So, after some experimenting, we figured out how to add the function keys to all the other XL/XE's! Our next product, was actually combining two into one, our Deluxe ICX-85 Keypad, adding the function keys to it. This made it easier to scroll around in those big spread-sheets or programming efforts. So, if that ain't enough products for ya, how about more!

Right now, we are working on and almost finished with; A NO-SOLDERING write protect controller unit for ANY 1050 drive (yes, with two-color LED also!). A two-drive B switch for the ST users that have two 3 1/2 drives and a PC-ditto 5 1/4 drive, is also in the works. The most unique product coming (will be done, by the time you read this article), is an image scanner for may popular computers, starting with the 8-bit Atari's! The Image Scanner is a joint effort between Sector Once Computers, and Innovative Concepts. What is an Image Scanner, you may ask? In this case, it is a Fiber Optic Link, between your computer and printer, using the cartridge port (on Atari 8-bits). Using the included software, you can insert a 8 1/2 by 11 sheet

and will not do great damage to software suppliers. I believe most piracy is done by basically honest people, who "BORROW" a copy of a friend's program to "TRY OUT". Others copy friends' programs with no intent of buying their own at a future date. They rationalize their actions by saying, "I'M NOT HURTING ANYONE, BECAUSE I WOULD NOT BUY THIS PRODUCT EVEN IF I DIDN'T HAVE A COPY." I do not believe that moralization and threats by software suppliers will stop this type of software sharing. Software piracy laws are unenforceable for the most part.

Therefore, software suppliers must realize that they cannot stop all piracy, and rather than wasting effort sending pirates on a guilt trip or making idle legal threats, they should take positive steps that will benefit legitimate owners instead.

Here are the ultimate weapons against piracy. I am happy that many suppliers of ST software are doing many of these things. Others, well...

1) Provide uncopy-protected software, along with a courteously-worded statement explaining that the software is provided for your use only, and distributing copies hurts all users. This creates a cooperative rather than an adversarial relationship where the user must fight the publisher to obtain or make a legitimate archival copy.

2) Provide good documentation and support. An example of piracy - prevention is the documentation that is supplied with Flight Simulator. The textbook on flight principles alone is worth what the program costs on the discount market. Furthermore, it is too large to photocopy easily.

3) Provide good pre-sales information on the product. When people are in the market for a particular type of software, and have several products to choose from, they often resort to "BORROWING" a copy of each product for evaluation. I have found it very difficult to get information on products. Dealers usually know very little about specialized products. The advertisements are there just to whet your appetite. Magazine product reviews are all too often a summary of the product's features, rather than an in-depth analysis of them. I love demo versions of software -- such as DbMan's, which is fully functional except that it will not allow more than a few records per file.

4) Provide frequent upgraded versions, with a generous update policy for registered owners.

5) Charge a fair price for products. I believe that many publishers are not maximizing their profits because they are charging too much. Products such as DBASE III and LOTUS 1-2-3 would be useful to many, many home users, but are so expensive that only businesses can afford them. Suppliers for ST business software are generally good about this. I use DbMan. It is an excellent product. Support is excellent. My cost: $75.00. At that price, I was not as tempted to find a bootleg copy as I would have been if it cost $400.

I believe game publishers in particular could increase their profits by charging less. I have spent a total of $56 on the discount market for 2 games. If games cost $10-15 each, my total expenditure on games would be much more. There are a lot of games out there that I would like to have, but they are not worth $25 to $30 to me. If a friend offered me a copy of one of these games I wanted, I would have a hard time refusing.

6) Finally, I wish magazines would quit printing long type-in programs, unless they are done to illustrate programming technique. If the goal is simply to provide the reader with another piece of software, the program should be provided on disk. I believe that magazines with disks could be provided at a lower cost. I buy DSDD diskettes in quantities of 50 for less than $1.70 each. I see no reason why a magazine with disk could not be sold at a good profit for $8.00 or so.

The magazine publisher could also sell space on the disk to software vendors for distributing demonstration programs. Can you think of better advertising than this?

If magazines are going to print type-in programs, they should not object to people storing them in "INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL DEVICES", or distributing copies of their labor to friends.

In short, I believe that positive reinforcement will be more effective in curbing piracy than any threatening legalese can ever be. Until this happens, see you in jail, where you are allowed to have a computer or a type-in program, but not both!

Single Purpose Computers

by Bob Haynes The Access Key

I had originally planned to cover another topic this month. But the September ACCESS meeting and a couple of recent moves by Atari virtually FORCE us to look at the hardware end of the computer. In a nutshell,

a) Neil Harris predicts a rosy sales season for Atari this Christmas season. b)

tend to make this an even better choice. One of the shortcomings of the 8-bit for serious word processing has been the lack of a 'real' 80 column (sorry, but those graphic simulations just didn't hack it). With my 800 I solved the problem with a "Bit-3" 80 column card. Of course it alone cost more than current 8-bit computers cost. Then I also had to buy a new 32K ram card because it used up one of my 16K slots. Now anyone can economically achieve 80 column capability with the new Atari 80 column adaptor, making the 8-bit an even greater choice for word processing.

For data bases you have a good selection of both general data bases as well as specialized data bases (e.g. for recipes, geneology, home inventory, etc.). Also, I have seen complete programs set up for small businesses and even to control/track point of purchase sales. The primary limitations for data base use have been memory and disk storage capacity. The 128K machines have helped the memory somewhat and databases can normally be broken down into more manageable components. But lets get serious now -- if you are going to start manipulating very large data bases, you need to be looking for something faster and capable of addressing larger chunks of memory at a time than can be achieved with any of the 8-bit computers, whether they be an Atari, a pretender to a nautical rank, or derived from an orchard. Now, as to the problem of disk storage, there is again cause for rejoicing. Atari has replaced the 1040 drive and its really 'dumb' enhanced density with true double sided, double density drives which have a suggested retail about the same as the old drives. Yes, they will still read single side, single density and that dumb enhanced density. Now you can get some serious storage capacity on a disk. And if that is not enough, some after market companies are making hard drives for the 8-bits.

Since I have been operating with 80 column and double sided, double density drives for many years I can testify to the fact that such power completely changes the complexition of the 8-bit Atari when it comes to business applications. However, I really envy those of you completing your systems now. For under $400 you can get a 128K computer; a double sided, double density drive; and a good monochrome monitor (you can use your existing TV for games and graphics). Admittedly I started putting my system together when the 800 cost more than a 520ST now costs, but a cursory inventory of my system and some quick calculations reveal that I could now buy almost six 520STs for what it cost me to build my present 8-bit system -- and that doesn't count the printers or modems. Pardon me while I pause for a few moments to get over the shock. I wish I had not figured up the cost; its one of those things you would just rather not know.

Education was another purpose to which you wanted to turn to your computer. Here, its hard to tell exactly where things are going. There appears to me to be some slow down in the release of new educational programs for the 8-bits. Naturally, the STs have drawn some of the effort away and it is still too early to tell how significantly the new series of Atari game machines will approach education. To the extent they do, their similar architecture to the 8-bit computers will create an even broader base of demand for such programs. In any case, there is currently in existence a great amount of public domain and commercial educational software available for this computer, and more continues to be produced by the major software companies as well as by teachers in the classrooms. The key here is supply and demand. If you are demanding it with your money by buying it, the software companies will continue to supply it.

The 8-bit computers still seem to have a glowing future when it comes to games. Yes, I know you claim you don't play games, but everyone else does so you might as well confess to enjoying the great game power of the Atari. The new game machines with larger capacity cartridges and stories of disk drives suggest an abundance of games for the Atari for quite some time to come -- after all, who can do it better?

No, the Atari 8-bit is not dead, but it has passed on the flag bearer role for the Atari line to the ST machines. Now you have greater choices. Weigh carefully what you want the computer to do and how much you can or are willing to spend. For some the answer will be a new ST. But for many the answer will be an economical yet powerful 8-bit or perhaps a few affordable up grades to a presently owned 8-bit. If you still think the 8-bit is dead, just give me a call and perhaps I will be kind enough to take that old worthless equipment off your hands. You see, I still get calls from people wanting to buy Atari 8-bit equipment, but much less seldom from anyone wanting to sell.

If You Knew MIDI Like I Knew MIDI

Well, if you are like me before I started attending the MIDI SIG, I guess you would not know much about MIDI except that it has something to do with those two round ports on the back of an ST. But now after attending a few meetings of the MIDI SIG, I am starting to understand sequencers, tone generators and such...

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